

Time After Time by orphan_account

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Summary:

The parking lot is dim and the muffled sounds of a middle school dance act as background music. She has a lot on her mind and a lot in her heart.

Time After Time

That feeling never goes away.

It is true what they say, you know.

Every day it does get a little easier.

His words echo in her ears, drowning out the muted vibrations coming from the school gymnasium.

She knows it's true.

Wounds heal as best they can but always leave a mark.

She has experienced the phenomenon in one way or another numerous times.

Her mind flashes memories of instances that caused permanent changes.

Some stick out more than others. Settings that acted as backdrops for major moments.

A tiny apartment in a city not too far away. A room in town hall with a flickering fluorescent light. A laundry room piled with clothes stained with lipstick and liquor. The dusty air of a disaster world. The winding halls of a place that occupied more dead than alive.

She looks for the moments that brought about positive change, but they flash too quickly or are skipped over entirely.

She's drawn out of the montage when he gently removes the cigarette from her trembling hand, drops it to the ground, and crushes it under the toe of his boot.

It's the closest they have been in decades.

She's tucked into his side and can feel his warmth, the rise and fall of his chest.

Now freed of the cigarette, she needs to find an anchor point.

She moves her hand between them and grips onto his coat, her thumb tracing the smooth curve of a button. She leans into him more, breathes him in.

Her mind wanders once again. Back to the lab. Back to her son slung over his shoulder like a rag doll. To the brave boy running through the halls alongside the doctor and the man who didn't make it out in the end.

She shifts her weight and bites her lip as the knot in her throat tightens.

She squeezes her eyes shut tight enough that she can see stars and watches them dance for a few moments before she blinks them away.

It makes her think of a slow dance in her living room. A cheap Halloween costume. A suggestion far too vulnerable and completely genuine.

Would things be different had they upped and left? Would they become the normal family she said they weren't?

What if they all made it out of the lab? If their life together wasn't cut short by the jaws of death?

She wonders if she would find herself here tonight.

She thinks yes, but wrapped up in a different pair of arms. And she tries to picture it.

But for some reason, she can't.

She clamps her eyes shut once more, wills her mind to produce the image, but it doesn't compute.

Anger, sadness, and guilt swirl within her.

She suddenly withdraws her hands from him and wraps her arms around herself before slightly stepping away. Not far enough to break free of his embrace, but enough to not be pressed up against him.

She feels his gaze on her, knows that his brow is furrowed and his mouth is downturned. So she peers up at him, meets his stare.

She sniffs in an attempt to reabsorb the tears that dare to fall but they betray her. She shakes her head, tucks her hair behind her ears, and gestures at nothing in particular.

She chases tears with a jittery hand as his own drops from her arm to the small of her back.

Another sniff and he shuffles a bit.

She looks down at the pavement and steps into his widened stance, her feet now bracketed by his.

She feels him splay his fingers across her lower back, his slow exhale slightly fluttering her bangs.

She allows him to pull her in, to close the distance.

She lays her head on his chest as his other hand smooths her hair, cupping the back of her neck and pressing circles into the tension that collects there.

She closes her eyes and takes deep breaths as she listens to the steady beat of his heart.